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Menario, John oral history interview

Andrea L'Hommedieu

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Interview with John Menario by Andrea L'Hommedieu

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Menario, John

Interviewer

L'Hommedieu, Andrea

Date

February 19, 2002

Place

Portland, Maine

ID Number

MOH 329

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Biographical Note

John Menario was born September 18, 1935 in Portland, Maine to Gladys (Thomas) and Michael Menario. The family moved to Falmouth, and he was educated in the Falmouth public schools from grade 7 through 12. He served in the military toward the end of the Korean War, and returned to Maine to study Public Management at the University of Maine in Orono. He earned his Master's degree from the Fels Institute of Government of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1962, he became the assistant to the city manager of Portland, which eventually became the Assistant City Manager position. He later became finance director of Portland, and in 1966, City Manager of Portland, a position he held for nine years. As city manager, he became involved in the Model Cities project. After leaving Portland City Hall, he worked for the Greater Portland Chamber of Commerce, and strengthened membership that had reached an all time low prior to his tenure. He then started a governmental consulting firm. He led the successful campaigns to Save Maine Yankee in 1980 and 1982, and unsuccessfully ran for governor as an Independent in 1986. At the time of this interview, he was a vice president and CEO of Peoples Heritage Bank in Portland.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Baldacci family; Portland in the 1960s; Portland urban

renewal programs; Model Cities; key people involved in Portland's urban renewal; Greater Portland Chamber of Commerce; 1986 gubernatorial race; "Save Maine Yankee" campaign; Charlie Allen; Harold Loring; Barney Shur; Widgery Thomas; and Edmund S. Muskie.

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Transcript

Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview with John Menario at his office at 2 Portland Square in Portland, Maine on February the 19th, the year 2002. I guess if you could start by stating your full name and spelling it?

John Menario: My name is John Edward Menario, M-E-N-A-R-I-O.

AL: And where and when were you born?

JM: I was born in Portland, Maine on September the 18th, 1935.

AL: And is that where you grew up, here in Portland?

JM: I did, I grew up in Portland until I got to grade schools, and about the sixth, seventh grade my parents moved to Falmouth, I completed my high school in Falmouth, Maine.

AL: And what was the Portland and Falmouth area like when you were growing up, do you have recollections?

JM: Yes, I do. Actually, I grew up in Portland during the war years, being born in '35 and getting to be a very young adult during the war years. My parents lived in a section of Portland that was in its day a fine neighborhood, but was showing a lot of neglect and a considerable amount of blight when my parents were living there. And as a result of that my mum and dad both made a decision that they'd save whatever few dollars they could with the hope of moving to the suburbs. My dad was a blue collar worker, and was also an Italian immigrant, so big earnings was not one that came easy to him. But they worked hard and saved. And right after the Second World War they bought a little plot of land in Falmouth and they moved there, and I got acquainted with new people and new friends in Falmouth. Falmouth was predominantly rural at the time. They built on what was then a small country road, and then little by little progress, if you can call it that, came through highways and commercial development and they ultimately ended up living at the intersection of Route 1, the, Route 1 went right adjacent to the property. But the loved Falmouth, and I enjoyed Falmouth High, as I did Portland actually, although most of my adult friends came when I went into junior high and high school in Falmouth.

AL: And what were your parents' names?

JM: My mother's name was Gladys, and my father's name was Michael. My mother's maiden name was Thomas, she came from an Armenian family and her father came from Armenia, so I'm a mongrel, I am half Italian, quarter Scotch, and quarter Armenian.

AL: And did you say your father was a first generation immigrant?

JM: Yes, that's correct. He came here when he was nine years old with his dad, they came from a rural community in Italy, a town called Montagnana, and my grandfather, seeking a better life for his family, came here and came through Ellis Island with then his first born son to, and wife, to establish a new life. And they saved as best they could and actually sent money back so

that other members of the family could come on over, which was not uncommon during those days. He originally went to Pittsburgh, and I'm not entirely sure why but I'm sure it was an area not, that he was not entirely comfortable with. And there were other members from the same town who had come to Portland, Maine, and I think they must have beckoned my grandfather and grandmother to come here where the ocean and the amenities in Portland offered perhaps a better start. And indeed they did come, and that's ultimately how our family got its roots in Portland.

AL: You probably were in Falmouth when you really maybe started to see the community as it was, you said it was fairly rural.

JM: Yes it was, in fact it was during my high school years in Falmouth where I really became addicted to local government. I was in a civics class in Falmouth and I was selected by the classmates to attend the town meeting in Falmouth and report back on how democracy worked in our town in Falmouth. And that was my first exposure to local government and I was fascinated by the process and watching the debates and learning about how issues moved forward. And I came back and made my report to the class, and began to follow town government as a result of that experience and actually decided, as I got older, that I wanted to enter public service. And after completing my studies, graduating from Falmouth High, I entered the service and, during the Korean War but fortunately was in during the tail end and did not see any real action, was stationed in Germany, but... So I got to see a little of the world, and made my first vacation trip into Italy, going back to some of where my roots were which was indeed fun.

I came out of the military and determined I wanted to enter the public service, and the University of Maine in Orono had one of the few undergraduate programs offering a bachelor's degree in public management. And it was also well known. Dr. Dow, who was then the sort of the dean of the public management school, and also the dean of the city manager profession in the United States, and I went there while Dr. Dow was still fairly active. And he took a number of us under his wing and nurtured us on in the studies for city and town management.

I actually got married before I went to college, and the beauty of it was the G.I. Bill of Rights which allowed me to go on. My wife's parents, my father-in-law was a longshoreman and was also a blue collar hard worker with no real resources beyond what he needed to keep his family going every day. And my dad similarly was a salesman for a linen supply company delivering linen to barber shops and beauty parlors and restaurants. And my mom was a full time mother, which was more common in those days. And so there was no real, I was the first one that went beyond high school, which was a thrill to both sides of the family, but they were not in a position to help financially other than all the care packages of food we'd receive while at Maine, which was fine. We, my wife and I headed to Maine, she got pregnant my freshman year which became, which was the birth of our first son during finals of my freshman year, I'll never forget that. And during the last three years while at Maine, I took a job in the evening as a bartender/waiter in a little Italian restaurant in downtown Bangor which was owned by the Baldacci family. And it's kind of fun to, having watched young John come in the restaurant as a little tiny boy and now move along in his own career for public service, and about to enter the race for the governorship of Maine. I've seen him move along in his own career; it's been fun.

But after graduating, (we'd had our second child the junior year which was another son), and Dr. Dow urged me to go on with my mas-, to get my master's degree, and I made him aware of the economics of life. With two children I really needed to get to work, and my G.I. Bill was running out my senior year. He made me aware, though, of the University of Pennsylvania, which again was noted for its academic training of city managers and town managers and people involved in state government, as well. Part of the Wharton School, not as well known as the business school, but they had a well endowed division of the Wharton School called the Fels Institute of State and Local Government.

Samuel Fels, who owned Fels Naptha, which was then a soap company, had made a small fortune and was most anxious to put a lot of it back to the betterment of Philadelphia, including wanting to train professional people in government. And as a result, the Fels Institute opened its arms up for no more than twenty students each year to come for their master's degree. And ten out of the twenty, in addition to getting free scholarship, would also get a fellowship which was a stipend comparable to the G.I. Bill. So I applied, wasn't sure I'd luck into, I really needed them both to go to school and the odds weren't good that I'd get both the scholarship and the fellowship, but I luckily did. So my wife and I and two children packed up and went to Philadelphia for a year of intense studies, and then the master's program required an internship to complete your master's studies and they would only place you in a community that had a professional city manager.

My wife and I, both from Portland, were anxious to get back to Portland and we had Portland down as one of our three choices. Either, you were allowed to select three communities, and if Portland was not available we were heading west, we had California as our next two communities. And they were about to send me to California because Portland was without a city manager, they had just lost the city manager at the time whose name was Julian Orr, there was a vacancy so they would not send a student to a community with a vacant position. I was the last student to be placed, and the last week of school the city of Portland hired a manager who was also a graduate of the Fells Institute, and called that week to the school to see if there was an intern they could send to Portland. So that was the beginning of my fate into the city manager profession back in my home town.

AL: And who was that city manager?

JM: His name was Graham Watt. He graduated from Fels several years before I did and was a city manager in Ohio, and he saw an opening in Portland and thought it was an advancement to his career. He was married with a young family; he applied and was accepted as the manager. I joined him in the summer of 1962 which, hard to believe but it's forty years ago this coming summer, and began as an intern, completed my six month internship while at the city. And when my internship ended he offered me a position with the city government of administrative assistant to the city manager, which I quickly accepted. Having come from Portland years ago, and my wife, it was kind of fun to be back. Particularly in my profession, where it was rare to get back to your home town. I then stayed with the city for fourteen years. I advanced from assistant city manager, they created the position of assistant city manager while I was there and I moved into that position for a couple of years.

And then I really got a little disenchanted with the city manager form of government, at least I thought I was disenchanted with it. I was watching my boss, Graham Watt, who always had a difficult time with the council. And there was a lot of acrimony and differing opinions and a lot of heated debates, and it was kind of an atmosphere that I didn't think it would be fun to live in all my life. So when the position of finance director opened up with the city I applied for it, and was appointed finance director for the city of Portland. And I did that for a couple of years until Graham Watt finally got tired of the difficulty in Portland and he moved on to a national position back in Washington, D.C. I was quite convinced I would not apply for the job, I was too young, I was only thirty-one, I had never managed a city in my life, and I was quite happy being finance director.

As it turned out, there were a number of council members who knew me and felt that I was up to the task and they urged me to apply. I resisted it, and that's when fate had its second moment in my life anyways. They hired a city manager from South Portland, a fellow that I knew well, Bernal Allen, who was in his more advanced years, he was now in his sixties. And I made up my mind after they hired him that when the position opened up again, if I was still in Portland, I'd be ready to put my hat into the ring. Little did I realize that Mr. Allen would have misgivings and decided not to accept the job after a weekend of reflection. And by then I was mentally ready to give the job a try, and did put my hat into the ring and was accepted by the council by, the first time I think it was a divided vote publicly. Usually by then the council closes ranks to show unanimity to give every manager a fresh start, but I was so young and so inexperienced that three of the better thinking council members did not feel they could support me publicly, and I had full respect for their decision. But the vote was six to three, and that was enough, and I started my career in 1967 as city manager of Portland, Maine.

AL: And what were some of the things going on in city government at the time you were manager?

JM: Well, the city was, the city was I guess, it was depressing, to put it mildly. And it wasn't because of an unwillingness or intentional neglect, but you have to understand that the city had come off about three decades of not having the ability to reinvest in its future. The 1930s were the Depression years and cities were struggling with huge welfare rolls and huge unemployments, and being able to build new streets and schools and highways was certainly on any urban community's list.

When the forties came around and we entered the Second World War, all of the national resources went into building bombs and planes and supporting a growing army. And there were not federal resources to help local governments, and local governments were also making their contribution to the national cause by the rationing of gasoline and food, you know. So there was for Portland at least the second decade of not having money to put back into the city.

When the fifties rolled around, the war was over and the national government began to use national resources to build highways, and the private sector started making automobiles again for people. And when middle class could buy a car and escape to the suburbs, then communities like Portland saw a huge exodus of its middle income families moving out to the Falmouths and the Cumberlands and the Cape Elizabeths, as the Philadelphias saw, and the Bostons saw, every

major urban area had a great out migration of the middle income families. So that in effect, when the federal government finally got around to recognizing the blight of urban America, they began the urban renewal programs in Washington, D.C.

And unfortunately, part of them began at a time when we didn't have an appreciation for good planning and historic preservation. The idea was slum removal, and that's exactly the name of the organization when it began in Portland was the Portland Slum Removal Program rather than urban renewal. But that was the mind set of the time, to physically destroy the slums. When I became city manager of Portland, I don't think the city could have gone any further down. So to that extent I was there at the right time and I think the city began to recognize that it just couldn't afford to sit any longer. There were values in the city that needed to have protection and advancement, and the council got very courageous. I recall when I began as city manager we had two open burning dumps, we had no sewage treatment capability. We dumped sixteen million gallons of raw sewage every day into the ocean in Back Cove. You couldn't get to downtown Portland without driving through a slum, we had no major highways. The Franklin Street arterial and the interstate system, and the Spring Street arterial, none of those existed. So when you came to Portland you came through what we call the Washington Avenue corridor or the Danforth Street area, and those were badly neglected neighborhoods. So, then when you got to downtown Portland, if you made it through, there was no public parking so you had little place to store an automobile. And if you were trying to do shopping in downtown, trying to find a place to put your car was a task and a half. So we really didn't have an environment for enterprise.

And we embarked on a fairly aggressive strategy to try to rebuild the city, and it really addressed the issues that one had to address. We needed a modern highway system. We needed to enter into public parking so that people that came to downtown would not have to ride around blocks at a time to find a place. We needed to start a very comprehensive code enforcement program to clean up the neighborhoods and help middle income people. What we actually did was a very simple strategy; we needed to find a way to get people in and out of downtown safely and conveniently. We needed to encourage business that we were committed to a long term future of downtown, so that they would start building new buildings again and office complexes. And we knew that the retail center of the world would probably shift to the Maine Mall, which was built during much of my time as city manager. And we had to recognize that downtown would no longer be the retail center of the universe, but could and needed to become the office center, the legal profession center, since we could build around the court's capabilities. And also there would be pockets of retail opportunity. The Old Port Exchange, when I began city management, was eighty-five percent vacant buildings. It was, not many people went into the neighborhood at night at all and not many women went into the neighborhood during the day time, it was very depressed. We had winos and homeless people and all finding shelter in a lot of the vacant buildings there.

So not only did we have to build a highway and parking capacity and encourage private investment, we had to clean up the neighborhoods. And we were fortunate along the way that the federal resources began to move to assist local governments. And we developed perhaps one of the best grantsmanship programs in city hall; at least the federal government told us it was one of the finest. We decided we couldn't rebuild the city on the property tax payers' back of

Portland, and what we needed to do was find a creative way to attract as many federal dollars to downtown Portland as possible. So we developed a young team in the planning department, their specialty became grantsmanship. And we had the benefit of, Senator Muskie was there at the time when we, the city had waited a very long time for an urban renewal program for downtown, and the longer it waited the more the city deteriorated.

And about the time I became city manager, we decided that we had to make a move, we couldn't wait any longer for the federal government to solve our problems, we should start solving it ourselves. So we actually began with some unassisted urban renewal, unassisted in that no federal funds were available. And when we began the Franklin Street arterial to open the city up to modern highway traffic, and the interstate was being built and we were going to, and we tied the Franklin Street arterial into it, we then started building a first public parking garage called the Spring Street Parking Garage, again with unassisted federal monies. And we began to build the Spring Street arterial so cars could come off the interstate, come into the Franklin Street arterial, and find their way to downtown Portland.

About the time we were doing that, the private sector came along and began to match what we were doing. Casco Bank was the first bank, in fact all the banks that existed then no longer exist today, which is hard to believe. But Casco Bank was one of the major commercial banks in Maine. Halsey Smith was their president, and Halsey saw what the city was doing and was determined to build the first new office building in downtown Portland almost since the turn of the century, like 1910, 1911 was the last time a major building was built in downtown. And in the early, late 1960s, early 1970s, Halsey decided it was time. We had just announced that we were going to take a major, by now we had received federal funding after we'd waited and stopped waiting, and once we got going on our own it seemed like everything came our way. We got federal funding for a downtown renewal program which we labeled the Maine Way Project, and that allowed us to clean up some blighted buildings in the downtown area, open up a major block for surface parking, which we ultimately hoped would have a higher use. That later became One City Center which is now a major office development, but served as a parking lot at the time. And it allowed sufficient parking, so Halsey Smith decided to build the first new office building for Casco Bank and other uses. And that got a lot of the other competitive banks nervous that they were going to be in the shadow of Casco Bank. So Canal Bank at the time, another bank which no longer exists, began to build a major office complex called Canal Plaza, which is still one of the choice locations in downtown Portland. We were building as a city the Spring Street arterial and were able to make land available for the Canal Plaza, so that they could expand beyond a single building. They ultimately built three office towers in downtown Portland.

While that was going on, Maine Savings Bank, another bank which no longer exists today, they were on Congress Street and they had a very aggressive president, Bob Masterton. And he was determined to be in his own new facility and to compete, and he began a project along Congress Street which strengthened the economy all up and down the street, while we were spending urban renewal funds to beautify the street, put in brick sidewalks. And then new amenities were coming like the Holiday Inn, and by then we'd attracted the International Ferry to go on the waterfront.

We had a very deteriorated waterfront, you can imagine, after years of raw sewage flowing there, nobody wanted to be anywhere near the waterfront. So we invested in a multi-year sewer strategy. We built an interceptor sewer all around the city of Portland to collect all the waste, and we entered a regional sewer system when I was manager, too, with the water district to begin treating the waste of Portland. We then entered a regional southern waste system, there was a lot of regional cooperation at the local level back then, and that allowed us to close down our last open burning dump and to clean up the waters. And once that occurred, the International Ferry terminal was built by the city, we got the International Ferry here, which was the first new investment in the waterfront for aeons, and that began to attract others who wanted to survive off the tourist trade.

Portland was only a community people knew when they drove through Portland to get to Bar Harbor and Boothbay Harbor and Camden and other beautiful destinations. No one ever came to Portland. And we were determined to make Portland a destination. And during those years the Old Port came alive, the central business district came alive, the waterfront came alive, Tony DiMillo with his own entrepreneurial courage brought in his rusty barge and converted it to a great upscale floating restaurant and all.

I think the thing that I am perhaps the proudest of, at least during my career as city manager, is that we really, we tried to create an environment for enterprise which did indeed happen, but more important we drove the slum landlords out of Portland. Slum landlords were in full supply when I began and we created a very forceful housing program to force landlords to fix up their properties. We demolished during my nine years as city manager, we required people to fix up dilapidated buildings, if not we would order them demolished. Most of them were vacant, but they became houses for people that were coming in from parts of Maine that really had no homes, let alone running water and all, and we were being inundated with both no housing and also a growing welfare roll, and an elderly population. So we, we embarked on a very aggressive public housing program, we built over seven hundred units of public housing during my nine years as city manager. I think it's the largest, it probably represents about eighty percent of the city's currently (*unintelligible word*) public housing, that was built during that interval. We also began a neighborhood restoration program, and we gave grants to low income people so they could fix up their homes, and we did low interest loans, much of it under a grant subsidized by the federal government.

AL: Was this part of Model Cities?

JM: Part of it was Model Cities, but part of it was a grant called the Code Enforcement Program that operated independent of Model Cities. And had we not been a model city, we probably would have still enjoyed the money for the neighborhood programs. But along the way, and I'm glad you reminded me of it, along the way during my nine years the city became an applicant to be a 'model city'. And this was the Johnson administration, the Johnson era, when federal monies were plentiful. There was no war eating it up other than later the Vietnam War, but initially no national war eating up national resources. And he had a very strong belief that local governments had to strengthen themselves in order to strengthen the country, and money flowed and we were good at grantsmanship, so much of that flowed to Portland. And one of the applications we submitted was to become a model city. This was a new approach by the federal

government, rather than putting money into a community through the categorical grants, in other words you'd get a highway grant, or a neighborhood grant or, you know, they would try to bundle up the money in a formula that would all come at one time, and you were allowed to disperse it.

It also, though, was a challenge to local governments in that the money required that you set up neighborhood organizations, and there was both good and bad that came of that. Many of the neighborhoods who had felt neglected, and for good reason because the city had put very little money back into their communities for years, many of them had become anti-establishment and they used their monies to create a hostile environment for government. I never really minded it, though, because it allowed an environment where you could encourage more public dollars into neighborhoods. They provided an external pressure that city managers and council members sometimes were not able to do on their own.

But a lot of good came of it, we had well-baby clinics that sprang up throughout the city. We had neighborhood organizations that helped prioritize what they wanted done within their own neighborhoods, and that was a big help. There were youth alternative programs to help youth, who were not getting through the public school systems, to recognize that their future required that they address their life. And much of it was done through the advocacy groups in the neighborhoods with people who they understood and respected more than they did perhaps the public school system and the public teachers along with it. It was a great experience, and I think on balance Portland benefited from its active years, five years, as a model community.

AL: Were there people involved that you can recall playing a significant role?

JM: Oh yes, yes. During my years as city manager, of course all, I think the courageous body was the council members. Nine members of the city council in Portland is really the governing body of the city. In addition is the school committee but it was the council that had to wrestle for the rebirth of the city as I call it. And they were courageous in that, for example, the Franklin Street arterial which was a needed highway, which we felt it was a needed highway to bring new life to downtown Portland. In order to do that, and we did it without the federal money, we couldn't wait any longer for federal funds as I told you, it was an unassisted project that later was eligible to match the federal dollars, but when we undertook it it was all city money. And the council had to dislocate upwards of three hundred families and over fifty businesses to make way for the highway system. And I remember the council evening when the room was packed and there was an overflow and we had to take space into the auditorium and bring the sound system there. And it was just people who for all good reasons did not want to lose their home, and particularly people who really couldn't afford to pick up and move elsewhere. Fortunately we had relocation assistant monies and provided professional-, but there's no place like home, and I can understand why they all came.

The council had to look at the city for the next ten or twenty years and had to recognize that coming in small neighborhood streets to downtown Portland was not a way to have a viable downtown, and they voted to build a highway and dislocate three hundred people. Using the power of eminent domain is a tough call, and yet they did it. They did it again when we cleared a block in downtown from merchants who had been there for years, and this was to become a

surface parking lot. And it was that lot that gave rise to the Casco Bank building, which then gave rise to two other major bank buildings. It took a lot of courage to do things like that. The sewer system required taxing people more. And I think when people, when I left city government the press would ask, as they often do, what did I think the turning point was in the city from becoming one of the more blighted communities on the east coast, to becoming so economically viable in a short time frame. And I said I think that the, it was a change of attitude. It was elected officials realizing they could make a difference, and also deciding that whatever they did they were going to do well. And if they could only afford to do one neighborhood, that they would do it well. And they went in with brick sidewalks and new trees and low income, and when that neighborhood looked beautiful by comparison with all the others, other neighborhoods required and demanded similar treatment and that just, then it's time to move on and do another neighborhood. After four or five neighborhoods, you no longer had to drive through a slum to get to downtown Portland.

And with the isolated slum property, we worked on a hundred and fifty isolated slum properties during that time, put in Vest Pocket Park so there'd be little playgrounds in neighborhoods and all. My first undertaking as city manager was what I called Operation Junk Lift. For whatever reasons, for years the city allowed junk cars to accumulate in everybody's back yard and the city was just riddled with junk cars. And it was kind of fun because I didn't know any better, I was too young to know better that you couldn't do those things, and we got the JayCees to have a community betterment program. We called it Operation Junk Lift, and we got the police department to identify where all the junk cars were, the legal department said you couldn't go on property and take that equipment. And so we ended up with just getting people to sign a form that if we took it off their hands at no expense to them would they allow us onto their property, and ninety-five percent of the people did. And I think within two weekends we'd lugged away three thousand or more junk cars out of downtown. And it kind of people gave people a spirit of "let's get on, let's keep going," and we did and it was great fun.

But the council was courageous. Some of the key players, and it's hard to single them out because they all made their contribution, but there was a councilor by the name of Harold Loring, since passed away. But Harold came, Harold was a hard working Irishman and he came from a hard working Irish family, and he was very active in the labor organization and was business manager of the brick layers association, when I got to know him. And he came in with very strong feelings about the need to work hard, and also to build a city for the next generation or two. And there was a sort of a populist movement at the time, most of the, not many of the council members were professionals. They were either small shop owners or other blue collar workers. But then we had a good splattering, Charlie Allen, I think of the three council members who couldn't support me when I was being hired as city manager and they came, became very supportive of all the things that they were asked to address after I was appointed.

Charlie Allen, who's one of my favorites, was a, is a lawyer and just comes from a great family (*name*). In fact, his dad was one of the original influences on bringing a city manager form of government to Portland back in the late twenties and the early thirties, and the name Charles Allen. Tom Allen, by the way, is a son of Charles Allen. Tom's a congressman today, and his dad was on the council when I was city manager, was one of my favorite council members. I often kidded him because he couldn't vote for me, and he did the right thing but later became

very supportive of all the things we did, and very supportive of me, as he would, knowing Charles Allen. Harold Loring and Charlie Allen were two of the visionaries on the city council. There were many others, but I'd have to single them out. Harry Cummings was an employee at the telephone company, another visionary who just loved the city of Portland. He was chairman of the planning board during most of my years as city manager.

And they, we, they were challenged all the time with things we were trying to do, building highways, building airports. We built during my time as city manager, what is now the general aviation terminal at the jetport, was the major terminal for the city, and we had only one airline, Northeast Airlines. We called it the Yellow Bird. We decided it was time we built a new airport and we even called it the jet port, we were sort of, we were getting arrogant after we saw the city come along. And the jet port was built, and new access, new parking and all.

I ought to mention what this is all about is Senator Muskie, and he had been, was and remained senator during my time and entire career as city manager of Portland, but when I became city manager in 1967, he had become so, so involved in Washington, major politics and national affairs. It isn't that he forgot Maine, he never did, nor would he have forgotten the largest city in Maine, but much of his attention was put into national political issues. We did obviously have the benefit of his involvement. I was active in the Maine Municipal Association as city manager of Portland and once a year we would take a group of local officials to Washington. And we always had our wish list and always had, more often than not, had the benefit of a congressional delegation that would sit and listen to us. And it was on those occasions, those few occasions, when I actually got to meet the senator and chat with him and recognized the influence that he had for a lot of things in Maine, many of which I would never appreciate without listening to the hundreds of interviews that you are conducting as part of the Muskie Archives. But it was clear he was a national leader, and his fingerprints were on a lot of good things that happened in Maine. And although it was never said, I'm sure the downtown urban renewal program that was granted to Portland was somehow influenced and spun out of Washington after years of waiting, by the senator's good wishes.

He was very close, both in age and his history of government in Maine, with [Barnett] Barney Shur who was then the corporation counsel for the city. Barney was well loved, much as the senator was, and they had a great camaraderie, the two of them, and Barney always had access to the senator whenever the city needed to have a listening ear somewhere in Washington. Barney has since passed away, but Barney always had a twinkle in his eye. He had a private law practice which is now one of the larger successful practices in Maine, Bernstein, Shur, Sawyer, Nelson. And Barney Shur was the Shur of the Bernstein, Shur firm. And he, at that time, because the city government wasn't large enough to support a full time corporate counsel, Barney also practiced private practice with his law firm, and also served as part-time corporate counsel for the city. And every time the city was without a city manager, I say every time, at least the years Barney was there, the council would always turn to Barney to fill the void until a new manager was found. So when I became an intern in '62 Barney was one of the first department heads that I met and I fell in love with Barney. Barney just was one of those people you had to enjoy. And he always had enough experience and good judgment to, whenever there was a moment where you had to think out loud, Barney was a great guy to think out loud with.

We also had great leadership from the private sector. This was, in the way that people talk about a leadership void today in governments, particularly in local government. And as I think about it I don't think it's because of a lack of talent or a lack of interest, I think there have been some very material changes in the demographics of communities, and in the lifestyle, that makes it difficult for people to play a leadership role. First of all, a lot of the businesses that I've identified no longer exist. Casco Bank is gone, Canal Bank is gone, Maine Savings Bank is gone. Our retail of clothes, Porteous, it's gone, Benoit's was another retail anchor, it's gone. And what's happened over the years is many of these companies were bought up by other companies. Much of the decision making left downtown Portland to other states where these banks were purchased. We saw a growing need for two heads of households both working, husbands and wives trying to work to make ends meet with young families, no one had the time for running for local office or being involved in community volunteer work. And so it doesn't surprise me when I think back at the times that I came through Portland that were, much of the, a lot of the leadership out of the private sector were from companies that were headquartered here and could make decisions here. And when you wanted to do a fund raiser, they would step up and make a commitment. Now the call has to go out of state, there's several other states that are trying to compete for the same resources, and sometimes the executive talent here is third or fourth down the ladder rung. And so, and as I say, single heads of households and two working heads of households makes community involvement far more difficult than it was when I was in the business. But Portland has continued, long after I left the city kept the momentum, kept the pace, but it was fun while I was there to watch, the museum was built.

I went on from city government to, my wife and I fell in love with Portland, we were never going to leave. I left the city manager profession while I still loved it, it was just the hours began to eat me up. By then we had a third child, and I had three young children and missing ball games and banquets to be at council meetings or workshop meetings or planning board meetings got to be too dear of a price to pay. So after nine fun years as city manager, I sought a new profession and went to the chamber as a president for the Greater Portland Chamber.

AL: Let me stop you and flip the tape.

End of Side A

Side B

AL: We're now on Side B of the interview with Mr. John Menario. Now, after you left, you went to the Chamber of Commerce?

JM: That's correct. I might back up for just one minute before I go to the chamber. I said that the major change in city government, I thought, was an attitude from being very negative and down on itself to feeling very good, which in fact did happen. But I think the other pivotal point that allowed the council to get more aggressive and to do so many things in a short period, is they actually began to recognize that taxes were not just an expense, that taxes were an investment in the future of Portland. And once you can recognize taxes as an investment, it's so much easier to make the decision than if you only look at it as an expense. And that was another pivotal change in the attitude of the council, from being negative to very positive, and from recognizing that all of this difficult work took money, but if you didn't invest then the future of

Portland would have been rather dismal. So much for that.

I went onto the Chamber, it's hard to believe that the Chamber would accept someone trained in government to head up the private sector, the business private sector, but when, they had, the Chamber during my time as city manager was a fairly strong and influential organization. But somewhere along its, its time, toward the end of my career as city manager, it kind of lost its momentum and there was a lot of rivalry among the communities of greater Portland. And what was happening, from a distance, I think it was easier for an outsider like me to see, but many of the business people were beginning to see the Greater Portland Chamber of Commerce as the Portland Chamber of Commerce. Much of what the Chamber was wrapping itself around were things that the city was doing, the new terminal, the new highways, new sewer system. And many of them were believing that that was in some way competitive and they saw their dues dollars supporting a competitive retail market.

When I went to the Chamber the membership had dwindled down to a rather embarrassing low amount of paying members, and they were well in debt which they didn't really realize at the time, and I didn't either when I took the job. But it didn't take us long to realize it, there were a lot of bills that had not been paid. But I had the benefit of being able to, after they hired me, to influence the business leadership onto the board, and also because they were mostly headquartered here was able to encourage them to put a few bucks in the pot to get the Chamber back on its feet. And I had some very good presidents of the Chamber at the time, Colin Hampton, who was the president of Union Mutual before it became UNUM and before it became UNUM Provident. Colin Hampton was very community minded and felt very strongly of what he called his 'back yard theory', making sure your back yard's in shape before you tell other people what to do. And greater Portland was his back yard, this was the headquarters. Bob Masterton, who was the president of Maine Savings Bank, very community minded; [John M.] Jack Daigle, president of Casco Bank; Widgery Thomas, president of Canal Bank. These people were just anxious to roll up their sleeves and make good things happen, and many of them were participants in the Chamber's rebirth. And Fred Pape, Pape Chevrolet, was, right after I was hired was the chairman of the board. And he and I along with several other people, Jim Moody from Hannaford Bros. at the time, president of Hannaford Bros., and several of the South Portland leaders, decided that we would try to reorganize the Chamber into a strong regional Chamber again, and we did.

We framed a new charter which gave local Chambers their own identity, and made it clear in the regional charter that unless a project had regional implications it should be left to the local Chamber to deal with, and the regional Chamber would provide coordination and what not. Little by little the regional Chamber came back alive again. I had no interest of retiring as Chamber president, and they knew that when they hired me, but it was fun to take them through a reorganization and help the Chamber get strong again.

And it was during the time that the Chamber became very active in the development of the fish pier in Portland, because fishing and fishing industry had a regional implications as well as statewide. We also planted the seed to get funding for what became the new bridge between Portland and South Portland which really got some of its early support from Senator Muskie, but then a lot of the dollars later on came when Senator [George] Mitchell began to have his

fingerprint, too, on major things that were occurring in Maine.

I left the Chamber after four years of the reorganization, formed my own consulting company. I had a consulting company, I was the founder and president of a company called Governmental Services, Inc., and we would hold ourselves out to assist private people who needed government involvement. Hannaford Bros., for example, was one of my clients, on their zone changes for new shopping centers and all, I would assist and represent them. Casco Bank was a client in terms of municipal finance and assisting them getting town dollars and trust funds, etcetera, and all. I did very well with the consulting business financially; I didn't like it at all. I discovered I really needed to be part of something, and although I had the company for seven years and did well financially I just, giving advice and having to move on was not my makeup.

And in 1986, actually before 1986, in 1985, I got the crazy idea I'd like to be governor of Maine.

And I thought about it for a while and I knew it was a long shot, but in order to be, and I had never been in either political party as a city manager for so many years, I was unenrolled and became comfortable as an independent, and decided I would run as an independent. And my hope was to- Joe Brennan was stepping down after eight years, so there had to be a new face in the Blaine House. And I thought even though it was a long shot, the Democrats might well have a blood bath as to who they wanted to represent them. And the Republicans had never, for a number of years, put up a very strong candidate, and I was hoping they wouldn't again. And so I started early and tried to raise enough money to hopefully encourage Jock McKernan not to come from Washington as our representative to run for governor.

I was wrong. He, I did raise a fair amount of money early on but, and I knew he was the person to beat and once he entered the race I knew my odds of becoming independent governor went down significantly. But I stayed in. But then Sherry Huber entered the race. Sherry was a good Republican and for whatever reason stepped out of the Republican Party to run as an independent. I think she was disappointed that the party wrapped themselves around Jock and not her but, I'm not sure about that, that's speculation. But I also know with two independents in the race we were both history. And as much as I enjoy and liked her and respected her decision, it was suicidal for both of us. But nevertheless, at that point I was so far into it I couldn't get out, and I stayed to the finish line. And I think a vote for Sherry or I was really a wasted vote, everybody knew that through the polls, but she and I evenly divided thirty percent of the votes that year. And Jim Tierney was the contender for the Democratic Party, he drew thirty percent, and Jock McKernan became governor with forty percent of the vote. So, it was fun. And for once and I enjoyed it immensely, running all through Maine and going in to the debates and getting to know more about Maine than I really did as a southern Maine, both a city manager and president of the Chamber. It was great fun. I'd never do it again, but it was great fun.

AL: What, yeah, I mean, because coming from a public administration background, I know others have talked about, and then stepping into politics and sort of saying, "Oh my gosh, I had no idea it was like this."

JM: Yeah, no, I agree. In fact I -

AL: What were the surprises that you had a long the way?

JM: Well, you know something, I didn't. Only because I was close enough to the political side of it all, I would watch the campaigns, at least for the council members. That was small scale stuff, but I would... A dear friend of mine, Bill Troubh, who by the way I should have mentioned, he became mayor of Portland, served along with Eddie Bernstein, two other of my favorite council members, both of them were mayors of Portland during my term as city manager. And both were great supporters of the city, and courageous in their own way and stood up against terrible odds to cast votes for very important decisions the city made. But Bill Troubh was very active as a partisan Democrat, and Eddie Bernstein was very active as a partisan Republican. And I used to, through lunching with both of them and getting friendly with both of them, began, and knew that the inner workings of politics was a down and dirty visit for periods of time, I had a great respect for it. So when I entered the race I, as a pu-, you're right, as a public administrator, one is usually naive to the actions or the inner workings, but fortunately I was not.

And I knew that my only chance of being independent governor was to discourage McKernan from ever getting in the race, so. I was, I knew I was dead early into the process. And the only reason I stayed is by then I had raised a, by my standards, nearly a half a million dollars. I didn't realize, I thought a million dollars would make for a credible campaign, but that year Jock spent a million and a half, and Sherry spent a million and a half, and Tierney spent a million and a half. This was back in 1986, and I wasn't able to raise much more than six hundred thousand. So, although I peaked early, my money dried up when everyone else knew I was dead, too.

But I know exactly what you mean, I watched Judge [Daniel] Wathen, Judge is my favorite, one of my favorite people, I just absolutely enjoy him. And as I, when he entered it I flinched because I know how thoughtful he is and how he wouldn't say a thing until he thought it through, and how he'd want to gather all the facts and make an informed judgment and all. And being able to speak the one minute bullet and being able to shoot from the hip's not the kind of things that the judge built his career on. And I just respect him, though, for recognizing it early on and exiting himself, at a time which had to be very difficult for him to do.

The only time I agonized over my campaign for governor was not when Jock entered the race, because I figured, you know, there's still a long shot, but when Sherry entered the race I knew it was history. And then, how do you keep going in a campaign and ask for more money when you know that you just can't do it, forget the odds, you just can't do it. And my wife, God bless her, she said a lot of people have invested into you up to now, influence the results, you know, say what you have to say at the debate, force them to do what you think they ought to be doing, you know. And then when you realized your mission is to try to influence the agenda, because you can't win any more, then the challenge gets all over again, start all over. It was fun.

AL: I'm interested in your involvement in Maine Yankee. First in 1980, '82, and then later in '86 when you were running for governor.

JM: Right, I had, when I set up my government consulting company I had left the Chamber, and it was now, oh, probably 1980, 1982, it was in the early eighties. And an initiative process had reached enough signatures that they were going to have a statewide referendum on shutting

down Maine Yankee. Central Maine Power Company, which owned Maine Yankee, at least owned the majority of Maine Yankee, was noticeably concerned about it. And the business community was concerned because Maine didn't have low power rates but the fear was, without Maine Yankee, it would have exorbitant power rates. And Central Maine needed a citizens' group, they knew that they could not go out effectively and convince the public to keep Maine Yankee. And they felt what they needed was a citizens' movement and people from the community to come forward and try to save Maine Yankee.

They interviewed several consultants to, so in effect it had a linkage to the company, but they knew, everyone knew whoever ran a, Save Maine Yankee would have sizeable amounts of support from Central Maine Power. I was a consultant and put my hat in the ring to handle the statewide election. And in fact I had forgotten that when we were talking about the governorship, I'd been in a statewide ballot issue with Save Maine Yankee. And then, Central Maine hired me, and my job was to form a citizens' wide group and more important, to understand the advantages and the safety of Maine Yankee so that I could handle all of the debates and all the speaking programs. The decision was made to, because sometimes there are different opinions and different arguments that go forth, and they felt one way to minimize conflict in what the company said or what the 'Save Maine Yankee' said, that I should handle all the debates and all of the speaking engagements. And I was game to do that. I didn't realize how demanding that was going to be, because of the emotions as well. In fact, when the polling, initial polling was done, the initial poll showed that the vote would happen and that Maine Yankee would be closed down by sixty percent of the voters of Maine. And so my task, with a lot of professional help, was to make sure when the vote was finally taken, that sixty percent of the people did not agree to shut down Maine Yankee. There was always the jurisdictional issue, could the voters shut it down anyways, but there was no time to debate that issue. The referendum was on the ballot and it was time to get out on the street.

It was an intriguing campaign, it probably was for me my first eye opener on the importance and the usefulness, but also the, how polling, the polling, the process of polling, how the process of the campaign can virtually, manipulate's too strong of a word, but influence the thinking of voters. And what was done early on for the Save Maine Yankee campaign was a very in depth poll of where, what was the background of the sixty percent of the people that wanted to shut it down, and what was influencing their thinking, and who did they respect? And who were they? Were they men, were they women, were they educated men, were they educated women, and all of the things you would normally find in a poll that sliced and dices information many different ways. It was my first exposure to such in depth polling. For example, the strongest supporters to shut down Maine Yankee, the poll discovered, was younger uneducated women in the household. And the poll also indicated that they identified best with women, not with men, and they identified best with professional women, and not with men. The strategy as the campaign wore on was to do the commercials. And to reach that audience the reasoning was young mothers in the home, uneducated, probably were tuner-ins to the soaps. And they bought, we bought a lot of commercials on the soaps, and all of the commercials were women doctors, or women engineers, speaking about why Maine Yankee ought not to be shut down. And every major category that had uncomfortableness with the plant, we were able through effective polling to get a pretty good understanding of what might allow them to think differently, and the campaign was geared around that.

When the vote was taken, the voters of Maine voted to keep Maine Yankee sixty-four, rather than shut it down sixty-four. It was, by that standard, a very successful campaign. It was the only thing I'd ever done when when it was over I was exhausted. After nine years as city manager, I didn't think anything could exhaust me. But the intensity of that year, the speaking engagements, the debates, the mothers who would come to debates with children in their arms and pointing the finger at me, that I was in fact going to kill their children through the emissions from the plant, and that eventually there'd be a meltdown and all of that, it was not easy. And it makes you think about whether what you're doing is right. I was comfortable and confident that I was indeed correct, that it was safe, that it was an important energy for Maine's future, and lacking alternative energies, that we ought to stay the course. There was a second campaign two or four years later, and I once again agreed to be the chief spokesperson. You'd have thought by now I'd have learned a lesson, but I didn't and we went back, and it was another successful campaign, successful in the sense that Central Maine got the majority of people in Maine to vote not to shut down the plant. A number of years passed, not a number but a few years passed, there was going to be a third campaign, I elected not to assist Central Maine Power. I began to have misgivings, I think, about the long term safety of any technology. And what really got me concerned about my own position with Maine Yankee was watching the space industry, and watching the explosion of whichever space craft went up and exploded.

AL: Oh, Challenger.

JM: Yes, I think it was the Challenger. And it made me realize that no matter how fail safe systems are, which is what I used to espouse, that there may come that moment in time when the technology fails us. And when I was seeking the governorship of Maine, I expressed concern about Maine Yankee. Having reached a point in my belief that although I wanted to believe it was safe, if there now were alternative energies, I was prepared to support it being closed in favor of safer alternatives. And that's what got me to my gubernatorial position, quite different than the one that I espoused and believed in when I was a consultant.

AL: Did people understand that, in the public, or did you get flak?

JM: A little of both, yeah, a little of both. I, you know, I was the Save Maine Yankee champion two out of three times, and so now to see me on the other side of the street I'm sure was painful for some of the people. But life's so short that for me it's what you see is what you get. And when I believe strongly that's where I'll be, and if I change my mind that's where I'll be. And I don't think it hurt my campaign, I think I was destined to lose anyways, and as I told you when Sherry came along she and I were both destined to lose, and we both did.

AL: Now, going back to your time at, working at Baldacci's restaurant, did you have a chance to observe Mr. Robert Baldacci?

JM: Sure, oh yeah, Bob Baldacci hired me. I had, I'll tell you a cute little story. I had, my wife was pregnant with our first child, and I knew that I needed to pretty soon find a job, in addition to being a full time student. And she was out hanging clothes one day when the upstairs neighbor... We were all in married student housing, you know, so misery loves company. And

then none of us realized we were poor and down and out because all of us were veterans, and we were all in the married student housing. And they were all Army barracks hauled in from wherever and so they were not palatial places, but that's okay, it was a warm place. And she came, I got home that day from school and she was all excited because the woman upstairs said they needed a new waiter/bartender down the Baltimore Restaurant. It was owned by two brothers, Bob Baldacci and his brother Vasco, and it was called the Baltimore, it was not called Mama Baldacci's at the time, this was the first, original restaurant.

And I discovered that all they would hire were married students and veterans because they knew every night two of us would show up for work, because we all needed the money. And they had ten of us and they didn't really care who showed up, they just wanted two people to come every night. So the ten of us would always divvy up the schedule for the week and who would work that week, and if we had a final we'd swap off and someone would do two tricks as a bartender. And we all worked two nights a week and we'd rotate on Saturdays. When I went down for the interview for the job, Bob interviewed me and within five minutes he, you know, he knew I was married and he knew my wife was pregnant, and he knew I needed work, and he hired me.

And I started, I told him I was heading home for Christmas vacation, that was my freshman year. And I had a job in, I grew up in Falmouth, at Skillings Greenhouse, worked there as a youngster, I committed to work the Christmas vacation, and I told him I had to go home and work out my obligation. He understood it, said, "Well, when you come back come on by and we'll get a schedule when you'll start work." And he said, "Before you go to Portland, I want you to drop by, I want you to meet my brother Vasco." So, my wife and I were heading back to Portland on school vacation and popped into the restaurant, and Bob introduced me to his brother Vasco. And I thanked them both for the job, and as I was leaving they handed me an envelope. Now, I hadn't been to work, they didn't know me from Adam. And I got in the car and while we were driving to Portland we opened it up and it was a Christmas card, and it had a fifty dollar bill in it. And fifty dollars in, was an awful lot of money. And I never forgot it; I just couldn't believe that they were so kind-hearted.

So I went back, and obviously you get friendly with people like that. And he was very much into the partisan side of government. In fact, he'd shoot me for telling you this, because he was one of my favorite people, but he was never terribly fond of the city manager form of government because he knew it made inroads into the spoil system; that if you weren't a city council member, you didn't always get a chance to decide who was going to be the department heads or whatever. But we'd joke about it, and we had enormous respect for each other. I used to chat with him, every time I'd go to Bangor I'd drop in and chat with him and have a beer, and tell him... They were so proud when I became city manager of Portland of course, as a former bartender at the Baltimore, so we had a lot of fun.

And then I watched John develop and used to chat with, used to kid Bob, when John was in the legislature I used to refer to him as a loose cannon, because there were days when I never quite knew what he was going to be supporting. But he really, he just became a marvelous elected official, and I marvel now at his maturity and his insightfulness and all. And I hope he makes it, he'll make a great governor. And his father would be very proud of him and his leadership.

AL: I don't think I have a whole lot of more questions.

JM: I don't think I have any more answers.

AL: I think, but one thing I might ask you is, on the occasions when you met Senator Muskie what was your impression of him, you know, physically, his presence?

JM: Sure, well you know, he looked like a senator, he acted like a senator, he carried himself as a senator. If you were in a room with him, he was sort of the center of attention. And his physical size, his voice, the way he'd project, you would never miss knowing he was there, and you would never miss knowing he was Senator Muskie. And I wish quite honestly I knew him better, I wish I had been more involved in both he and his office. But with Barney Shur and with my coming in at a later time in the senator's development, it just wasn't to be.

But I would, the people that I know that knew him were incredibly fond of him, and he became a legend. He became a legend in Maine of having established the two-party system as you know, and shaking the system by being the first Democratic governor for aeons, and going on to great national prominence. It must be the Maine water, we do that with so many of our, you know. I think of how small this state is and I think of the Senator Muskies and Margaret Chase, and I think of George Mitchell and I think of Olympia [Snowe], and I think of Senator Cohen. It's amazing in such a small state that so many of our elected officials would gain national prominence. Just, it's the good air, the good air or the good water.

AL: Thank you very much.

JM: My pleasure, Andrea, thank you for including me.

End of Interview